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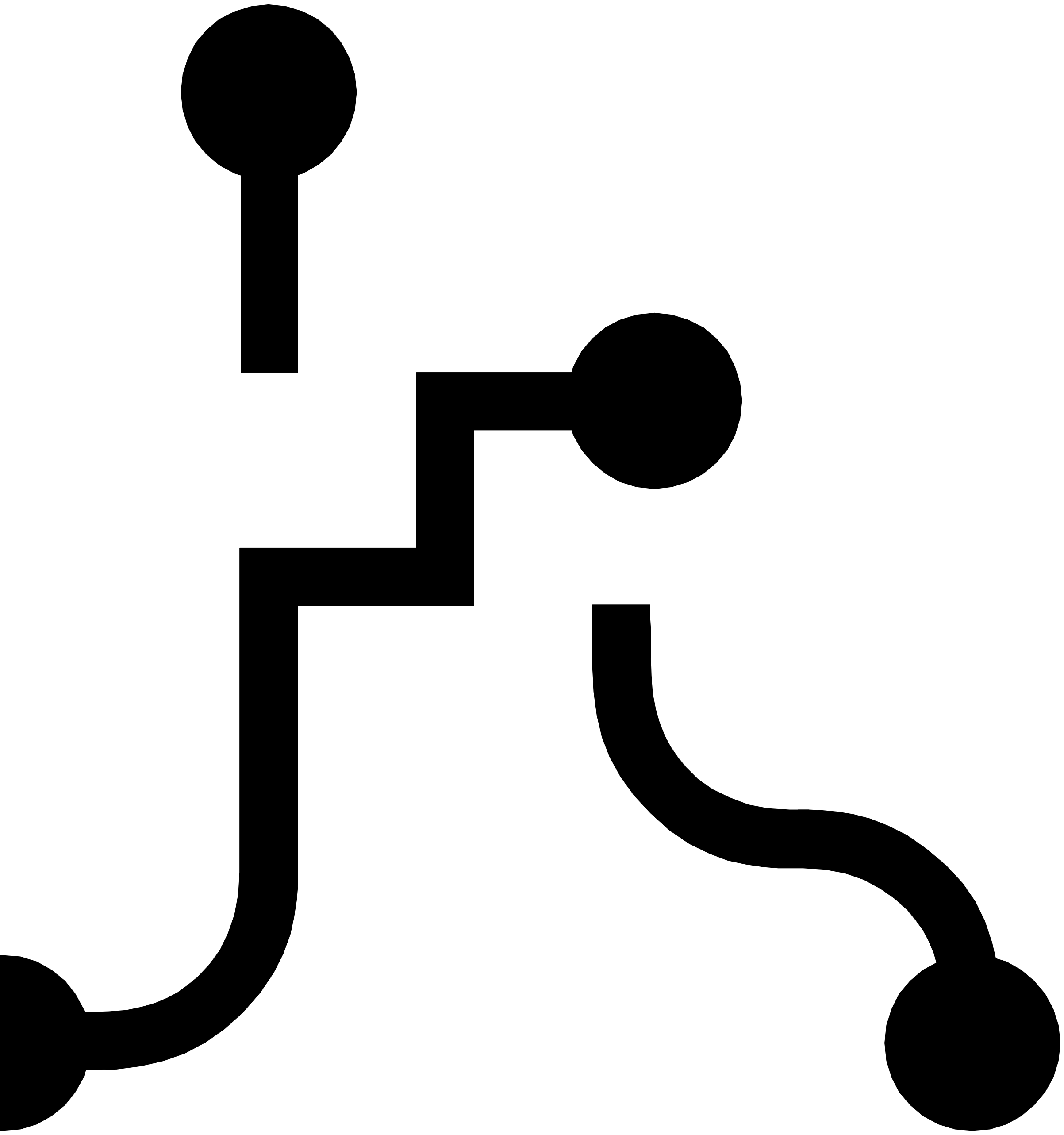

From Jakobson to the market, via mirror neurons: for a semiotics of communication

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the semiotic value of Jakobson's model, often overlooked and considered outdated due to its linearity and binary structure. Beyond these aspects, and without absolutizing the structuralist position, we aim to demonstrate how the model provides a set of highly useful tools for Brand Semiotics. The analysis seeks to show how Jakobson's model and its functions serve as a means for rigorously grounding and epistemologically underpinning both the analytical-interpretive and strategic-creative activities of branding and advertising.

Keywords: Jakobson, Structuralism, Brand Semiotics, Communication

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0. Introduction

The communication model formulated by Roman Jakobson (1963) represents one of the most significant contributions of structural semiotics to understanding communicative processes in all their forms. Due to its simplicity and the binary logic upon which it is based, this model has often been regarded as outdated in semiotics (Derrida 1969). This article highlights the role Jakobson and his model have played in the evolution of a semiotic theory of communication and how, despite its historical limitations, it can still serve as a valuable tool for those working in branding and advertising. In the following pages, we will demonstrate how a thorough understanding of this semiotic framework and the functions it encompasses can be an essential tool in two key areas: the interpretation of branding phenomena (such as websites, advertising texts, social media, and physical consumption spaces) and the creation of new branding messages and texts.

Through this work, which draws on concrete examples and case studies, we seek to bridge academic research on theoretical models of communication and signification with the practical work of those actively engaged in these processes. Our goal is to provide a rigorous, systematic, and epistemic framework for the strategic activities that shape a brand and its diverse communicative facets—an objective that several scholars have already begun to explore with success (Floch 1990, 1995; Marrone 2007; Diotto 2018; Fazioni 2021; Ceriani 2001, 2007; Volli 2003; Rolle 2014; Beasley-Danesi 2002; Lawes 2020; Machuco Rosa 2015; Caro 2013; Boero 2017, 2020; Rossolatos 2014, 2015).

In this context, we aim to introduce into the field of brand semiotics a model that strengthens both analytical-interpretative and strategic-creative dimensions. To achieve this, we will expand the model to accommodate the new linguistic forms emerging from digital media (Kotler et al. 2016). With this approach, we do not claim that brand semiotics should be limited to structuralist theories or Jakobson's model. On the contrary, we acknowledge the value of further developments in text semiotics (Greimas - Floch), cultural semiotics (Lotman), cognitive and interpretive semiotics (Peirce - Eco), and socio-semiotics (Landowski - Marrone). More humbly, our aim in this work is to reintroduce into the well-established field of brand semiotics a series of concepts that have, until now, been somewhat neglected1.

1. Overview of Jakobson’s communication model

Jakobson (1963), the father of structuralist communication theory, is credited with developing a model capable of clearly and effectively representing every communicative act. While this model is often considered too simple and direct to avoid constant critique and revision, simplicity does not equate to triviality. In fact, Jakobson’s framework surpasses earlier basic models which still constitute common currency in marketing communications theory and practice (e.g. Shannon-Weaver 1949), integrating them and radically transforming them in the process. Jakobson (1987) summarizes his model as follows:

“Language must be investigated in all the variety of its functions. An outline of these functions demands a concise survey of the constitutive factors in any speech event, in any act of verbal communication. The ADDRESSER sends a MESSAGE to the ADDRESSEE To be operative the message requires a CONTEXT referred to ("referent" in another, somewhat ambiguous nomenclature), seizable by the addressee, and either verbal or capable of being verbalized; a CODE fully, or at least partially, common to the addresser and addressee (or in other words, to the encoder and decoder of the message); and, finally, a CONTACT, a physical channel and psychological connection between the addresser and the addressee, enabling both of them to enter and stay in communication” (66).

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[1] An interesting attempt that moves in the same direction but focuses on the world of packaging is found in Lemon (2018).

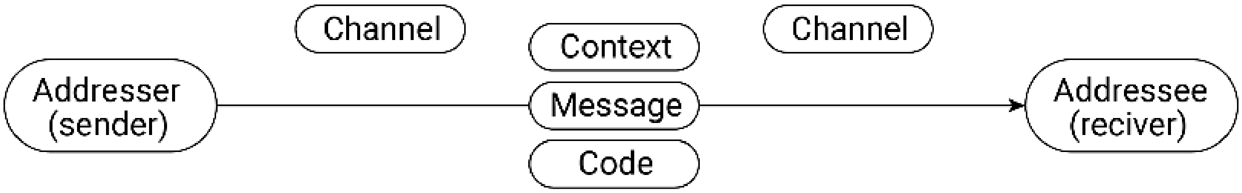

Figure 1. Jakobson’s Communication Model

In addition to the addresser, the message to be conveyed, and the addressee2—elements already present in previous models—what truly deserves attention is what occurs at the center of the model.

The Code refers to the system of syntactic rules that structure the message and facilitate its understanding. Saussure (1916) referred to this system as *langue*, Hjelmslev (1968) as *code*, and Umberto Eco (1984), in *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, traces the history and limits of this concept. For our purposes here, the code is the set of rules that explains the multiplicity of processes, based on a few (potentially simple) underlying principles. If I can generate an indefinite number of sentences in English, it is because I am using certain syntactic and semantic rules that allow me to combine a subject, a verb, and one or more complementary components.

We thus observe a process of encoding, through which an expression is assigned to a content (Hjemslev 1968), and a process of decoding, through which content is derived from an expression. If the sender formulates a message using a code not shared with the receiver, the latter will be unable to decode it. Natural languages constitute codes, as do symbolic systems such as traffic signs, the dance of bees (Benveniste 1966), and even the decimal numerical system. While it is beyond the scope of this discussion to delve into the limitations of a code-centered semiotics, as

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[2] Despite Jakobson's intentions, the roles of the addresser and addressee he describes can inadvertently give rise to a value schema of the active-passive type. Eco (1979), however, challenges this notion significantly with his theory of interpretative cooperation between the author (a redefined form of addresser) and the reader (a redefined form of addressee).

highlighted by Eco, it is nevertheless essential to underscore how a reinterpretation of Jakobson's model in light of the concept of encyclopedia could foster future and further interpretative developments3.

It is said that Thomas More's wife did not welcome the visits of Erasmus of Rotterdam. At the table the two humanists would converse in Latin on the most important and captivating topics, envisioning the future through their words. For her, however, not speaking Latin, those poetic words, those flights of intellectual thought, were merely noise. This was because she did not share the same code.

The Context refers to the socio-cultural realm of thoughts, ideas, and values that both the sender and the recipient can draw upon when communicating. The fact that it is socio-cultural does not imply that it is extra-linguistic or extra-cognitive: we are not referring to the material situation around us, but to the symbolic references and values shared by those who belong to a particular culture, as well as those who have acquired it. This explains why even someone with a high level of competence in a foreign language (in terms of its code) may still struggle to engage effectively with speakers of that language: some connotations and linguistic nuances may remain inaccessible or unexpressed.

When a native English speaker uses the expression *"on the ball"*, a dictionary-based knowledge of the code alone is insufficient to analyze the overall content of the message. A literal translation would lead to misunderstanding. What is required is an understanding of the context, almost an immersion within it. A similar situation arises in conversation when someone refers to events or individuals, assuming the interlocutor’s familiarity with them, even though the latter may be unable to fully connect them to the meaning of the statement. Communication difficulties of this nature often occur not only between different cultures but also among social groups (e.g., generations, lifestyles, digital communities), stemming not from the code itself but from the context.

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[3] See Fazioni 2021.

The Channel or Contact is the physical and psychological connection that unites the individuals involved in communication, either materially or virtually. This includes both the physical connection (e.g., communicating via the web from miles away, through a smartphone capable of sending photos, audio, and emoticons, or through an analog channel) and the psychological connection (the way communication tools affect us as message-exchanging individuals).

In his seminal essay *Linguistics and Poetics*, Jakobson extrapolates six primary functions from his communicative model, each arising from the actions performed by the six elements previously identified. While the model itself explains how a communicative exchange is structured and describes the factors involved, Jakobson's theory of functions delves into how communication occurs, exploring how the aforementioned factors operate in practice. This represents a shift from the passive to the active dimension.

The diversity lies not in a monopoly of some one of these several functions but in their different hierarchical order. The verbal structure of a message depends primarily on the predominant function. But even though a set (Einstellung) toward the referent, an orientation toward the CONTEXT — briefly the so called REFERENTIAL, "denotative", [114] "cognitive" function — is the leading task of numerous messages, the accessory participation of the other functions in such messages must be taken into account by the observant linguist.

The referential function—the one that denotes what is being discussed ("this is a cat", "that is my laptop")—is the dominant and most common function in language. But it is never the sole one. The secondary functions, even if present in a more marginal way, still possess the ability to alter the overall meaning of a communicative exchange, allowing us to access a richer level of meaning. We then come to understand that words, sentences, and discourses do not merely describe the world but also act to change it and modify our behavior.

In his analysis of these functions, Jakobson sought to understand what transforms a message into a work of art (literature). We will extend this inquiry further to explore what makes a message the expression of a brand.

2. Jakobson's functions as tools for branding and communication

2.1 Emotive or expressive function

This function pertains to the addresser or, as Benveniste (1966) describes it, to the act of enunciation, and is concerned with the ability to express personal content, emotions, and feelings through speech. In the discursive performance, the sender therefore tests their competence by using personal pronouns, first-person singular verbs (or first-person plural in some languages), and possessive adjectives. These are key indicators of the emotive function, though it is important to note that they may appear implicitly, subtly, or figuratively, especially when the emotional content is conveyed through non-verbal signs (e.g., images or graphic elements).

The sender speaks about himself, leaving a trace of his identity within the message (as Benveniste's concept of *débrayage* suggests). This introduces a semiotic dimension that previous linguistic theories would have placed outside the realm of language, regarding it as a psychological residue. In speaking, the sender embeds himself within the discourse, assuming a more or less evident role in the unfolding of the message, ultimately becoming a more or less visible character in the 'story'. We often encounter this in brand narratives, where a sender or author saying "I" plays a crucial role in fully understanding the message we receive.

It follows that the emotions introduced by the speaking I in the discourse are not spontaneous. There is design at work—a purposeful construction of the emotional function that leverages a psychological-cognitive dynamic: empathy, whereby the reader identifies with the protagonist (the I appearing in the advertising text), the ability to put oneself in another's shoes and experience their emotions.

A significant portion of McDonald's emotional-expressive strategy lies in its famous payoff, *"I'm loving it"*, where the subject of the actual enunciation (the brand) speaks on our behalf, attempting to have us adopt and interpret this role. The *I* reading the phrase is semiotically shifted into the position of the *I* pronouncing it, which, in turn, speaks about them. This creates a substantial emotional charge that permeates the brand's discourse.

This dimension of empathy is grounded in a crucial neurological mechanism: mirror neurons, a particular class of neurons that become activated both when we perform an action and when we observe another performing the same action. The discovery of mirror neurons originates from the study of neural patterns in primates. Credit for this discovery goes to the Parma school, particularly Rizzolatti and Sinigaglia (2014). Through advanced techniques such as functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), transcranial magnetic stimulation (TMS), and electroencephalography (EEG), it has been revealed that this class of neurons is also active in humans, not only in motor and premotor areas but also in Broca's area, which is associated with language and is located in the inferior parietal cortex. These neurons play a fundamental role in cognitive processes (the theory of mind), understanding others' behavior, the development of social skills such as empathy, and language acquisition (Rizzolatti – Arbib 1998).

From a linguistic perspective, the most widely accepted evolutionary theory suggests that mirror neurons, due to their proximity to Broca's area, are linked to the comprehension and decoding of gestures. Moreover, mirror neurons also facilitate the understanding of intentions and meanings. Thus, the ability to comprehend emotional meanings is directly tied to these neurons, which neurologically underpin the possibility of understanding others' emotions and recognizing them within linguistic meanings: if language evokes emotion, it is because mirror neurons intertwine the understanding of action with the interpretation of linguistic meanings.

2.2 Phatic function

Derived from the Latin verb *fari* (to speak), this function pertains to the establishment of the physical and/or psychological channel through which communication between sender and receiver occurs. It also involves the verification of the channel's functionality, as illustrated by familiar examples such as the Italian “pronto” (hello) spoken when answering the phone.

During the lockdown, video calls became indispensable elements of interpersonal communication. Within these technological and media forms, the phatic function assumed a particularly significant role. Faced with the distressing challenge of impeded contact and physical closeness between individuals, the value of the phatic function increased, acting as a mechanism to ensure the continuity of the channel and the possibility of a communicative connection. As Jakobson (1987) wrote:

> There are messages primarily serving to establish, to prolong, or to discontinue communication, to check whether the channel works ("Hello, do you hear me?"), to attract the attention of the interlocutor or to confirm his continued attention (68).

We began every video call with “Can you hear me? Can you see me?”. What might have initially been a practical necessity (overloaded connections, limitations of the technology) gradually evolved into a phatic formula and a way to verify the virtual relationship with the other.

The semiotic aspect intertwines with the cognitive one, as the phatic function is connected to attention. This aspect is undoubtedly very important in the realm of brand communication. The brand discourse, as Marrone (2007) would argue, must establish contact with the external world, the audience, the followers. Achieving this today, amidst a deluge of messages, content, and stimuli, is undoubtedly complex. Traditional touchpoints (proximity stores, commercial spaces) allowed for significant phatic continuity, just as the reduced volume of content made it easier to engage the addressee (billboards, magazine pages, trade fairs, early websites). Today, when such touchpoints still exist, they are integrated into a multifaceted and discontinuous flow of contact points or channels: the web, social media, AR, pop-up stores, to name a few examples. Therefore, considering the phatic function is a strategic concern for those involved in brand communication. It enables the creation of a link with the audience, but more importantly, it helps maintain that link or, at the very least, capture attention within a discontinuous brand space often characterized by immersions and emergences.

In line with visual semiotics (Fabbri, Fontanille, Floch), we might seek to move beyond Jakobson's framework and identify the presence of phatic functions even in visual and non-verbal languages. Stereotypical formulas, akin to those outlined by Jakobson for verbal language, can also be identified in visual language. Here, we will limit ourselves to what is relevant for Brand semiotics. An example is the off-screen gaze of the protagonist in an advertisement. The color of packaging is one of the primary phatic features that captures our attention. Whether it is a color strongly associated with that product category or one that stands out significantly—particularly when considering supermarket aisles as a system of positions and colors—it plays a crucial role. In digital contexts, such as a social media timeline (e.g., Instagram), the rapid scrolling of content halts in response to visual elements (shapes, symbols, colors) that we immediately associate with a brand of interest or that catch our eye, prompting further exploration. This reflects a strong connection between semiotics and cognitive analysis, focusing in this case not on emotion but on attention. Neuroscientific studies (Diotto 2021) offer valuable insights into the phatic function. Through experiments using sensors that detect electroencephalographic signals and specialized eye-tracking glasses, researchers have meticulously mapped the areas of a supermarket where consumer gaze tends to focus most. This provides valuable resources for strategically positioning products with higher or lower profit margins.

Similarly, specialized software can highlight the most viewed areas of a website. Consequently, we have high expectations for these experiments in further exploring non-verbal phatic functions, whose existence was first recognized by semiotics.

2.3 Referential function

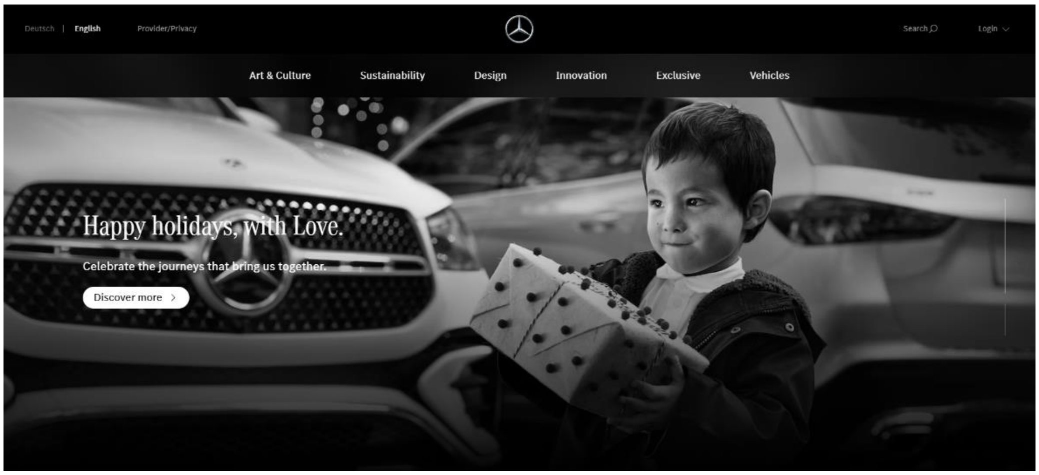
The message refers to the world, having a denotative dimension that extends beyond simply identifying states of affairs (as in Saussure’s concept of the referent) to include the socio-cultural context within which those things exist. Thus, it involves the cognitive dimension of meaning.

2.4 Conative function

This function is concerned with producing persuasive effects on the addressee, aiming to modify their behavior. If words bring about real-world effects, it is because every communicative exchange seeks to alter the actions of the addressee.

In the realm of digital communications, this function takes center stage in the form of calls to action, which prompt the addressee to perform specific actions. These calls drive concrete behavior following the understanding of the message: “click here”, “buy this”, “ask a quote”.

Calls to action are ubiquitous on the web, often appearing as clickable buttons. They could be explicit or implicit. For example, one can see this on the homepage of the Mercedes website:



Happy holidays, with Love.

Celebrate the journeys that bring us together.

Figure 2. The Homepage of www.mercedes-benz.com

The conative function of this textual message is subtly embodied in the button labeled “discover more,” which is seamlessly integrated with the central image, creating an almost imperceptible "see-don’t see" effect. The objective is to persuade without making the sales intent too overt.

In contrast, the homepage of booking.com is clearly biased towards the conative function, featuring an array of calls to action directed at both end customers and hoteliers:

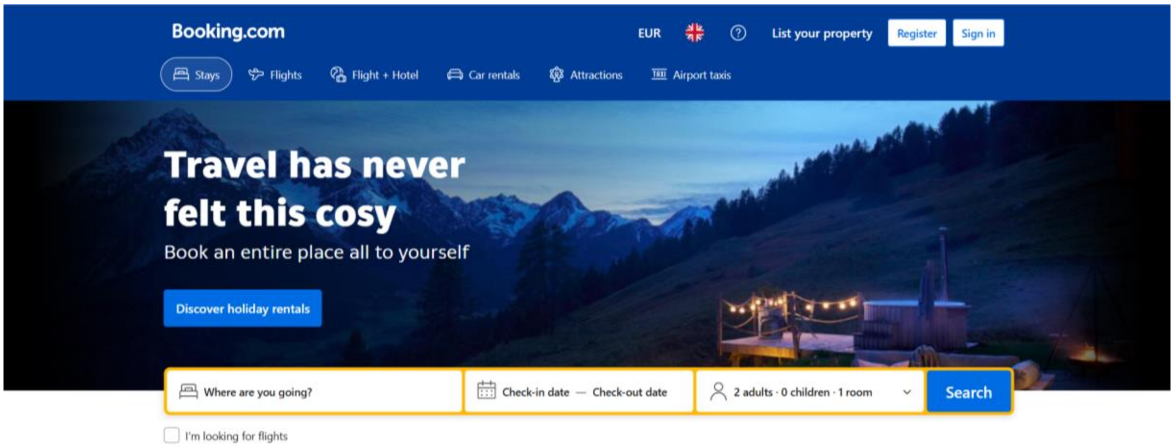

Booking.com
EUR
List your property
Register
Sign in
Stays
Flights
Flight + Hotel
Car rentals
Attractions
Airport taxis
Travel has never felt this cosy
Book an entire place all to yourself
Discover holiday rentals
Where are you going?
Check-in date — Check-out date
2 adults · 0 children · 1 room
Search
I'm looking for flights

Figure 3. Homepage of www.booking.com

The world of social media also provides valuable insights into the conative function. Ads on platforms like Facebook and Instagram showcase distinctive forms of calls to action. The average user finds a way to follow the conative function of these ads. Clicking on a photo, for instance, often triggers a conversation with questions and answers, sometimes involving an automated bot.

2.5 Metalinguistic function

This function is related to the code itself. Within this function, we consider the perspective of the semiotics of code or *langue*, acknowledging the existence of a system of syntactic and semantic rules that allow the sender to formulate a message and perform an individual act of speech—rules that also enable the receiver to decode and understand the message and grasp its meanings.

But is the code limited to verbal language? To the codes of English, Italian or French? The shift in semiotics leads us to answer in the negative, suggesting that there are as many codes as there are types of language. Language is a plural category, and we should rather speak of languages.

This insight was already recognized by the psychology of communication, particularly in the famous pragmatic theory of the Palo Alto School (Watzlawick, Beavin, Jackson, 1971). The verbal element is just the smallest, conscious part of the communicative act, like the tip of the iceberg. The majority, which is almost invisible or entirely unconscious, is made up of the non-verbal (gestures, expressions, positions, etc.) and paraverbal components (speech rhythm, pauses, and recurring expressions like “um” that divide speech into meaningful segments).

Thus, there are at least three major codes: verbal, non-verbal, and paraverbal, within which communication sciences and semiotics have identified numerous specific codes.

The verbal code encompasses both the oral and written registers, a well-known theme whose history spans a rich variety of paths from Plato to Derrida. Many add the musical code, which, aside from verbalization, focuses on sound itself.

The non-verbal code allows us to explore the visual realm, including photographic (images that reproduce reality, more or less distorted), graphic (the creation and design of semiotic elements, images that constitute new realities with forms and colors serving as their sub-codes), cinematic, or video (moving images, constructed through camera angles) forms. We might say that the visual realm is a blend of several codes: images, colors, and movements. In general, the choice of one code over another opens specific communicative possibilities while limiting others. For instance, the photographic code often ensures greater authenticity in communication, whereas the graphic code conveys a higher degree of personalization.

The body language, central to much of non-verbal studies, is composed of movements (the kinetic code) and gestures (the proxemic code): in a communicative exchange, the way we move, the distances we maintain, indicate familiarity, shared understanding, discomfort, or caution. This phenomenon can also hold significant relevance in forms of communication between different cultures.

In the realm of contemporary advertising, the body is a primary vehicle for meaning. In a post swiftly passing through a social media timeline, a short YouTube video, or a billboard at the exit of a central station, the image often proves to be more direct and impactful than words. And which image could be more powerful than that of the human figure? Particularly when it is the body to which the advertised products or services are directed. In this regard, the body becomes a true meaning-producing machine. The crossed or open arms, the gaze directed toward the recipient or toward new horizons, the posture, and the clothing that covers or exposes, that reveals or conceals parts of the body—each of these elements prompts us to imagine what is hidden. In other words, the body serves as a medium of expression that marketers and communicators shape to convey meaning.

In the advertisement portrayed in Fig. 4, part of a campaign created for the fashion brand Fendi by photographer Karl Lagerfeld (2011–2012), the body of Russian model Natasha Poly becomes a veritable mine of signification. From her hair, which obscures her face while allowing a direct gaze to emerge (phatic function), to the positioning of her arms and legs, the image culminates in a striking "quotation" of the Venus statue, a classical ideal of beauty. The statue, an enduring symbol of the body and its aesthetic, almost serves as a counterpoint to the modern, colorful body in the foreground, which boldly leans on the classical form without submitting to its constraints. This juxtaposition projects a reimagined idea of beauty—contemporary, liberated, and confident.

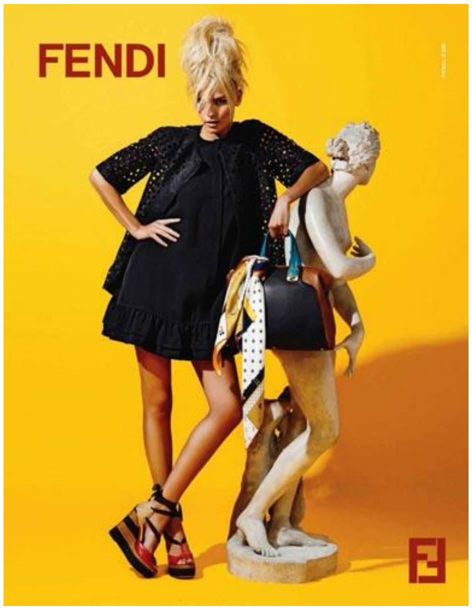


Figure 4. Screenshot from https://www.designyourway.net/blog/fendi-ads/

The role of the body is even more decisive in other advertisements from the same Italian fashion house, which can be found at the same URL, where the scenes are notably simplified, and the model's body takes center stage in constructing the overall meaning. We are not advocating a return to the commodification of the female body in the advertising of the 1980s and '90s. Rather, we are emphasizing the significance of the language of the body, or more accurately, the languages of the body: gaze, expression, posture, proxemics, and, additionally, clothing and makeup. For those involved in marketing and communication, it is essential to recognize this plurality of codes, a task that semiotics—more than any other discipline—can uniquely foreground. In brand discourse, the visual component of a text plays a crucial role. We can strengthen our analysis by introducing a brief digression on visual semiotics. The visual component of a text can be analyzed using the tools of visual semiotics, a discipline whose foundations are rooted in the works of Greimas (1984) and Floch's (1996) contributions to the study of visual identities.

Generative semiotics identifies, within superficial narrative structures, a level of visible figures that embody the deeper structures and core values of the semiotic square. At this level, the semiotician distinguishes two key elements that constitute the "visible." The first is the figurative, referring to the plane of images and representations of people and objects: images, paintings, and photographs are understood as representations of the world. The second is the plastic, which concerns spatial, topological, and chromatic elements that transcend their representational content: lines, shapes, colors, as well as elements of continuity and discontinuity, textures.

The plane of visible language, as Greimas (1984) notes, shares much in common with the poetic register, particularly with the Jakobsonian function we will discuss later. On the figurative level, the focus is on understanding the meaning of symbols, images, and visual signifiers: much of this meaning is highly connotative and carries a multitude of cultural references. It is not determined by a stable code but by unexpected associations, often unconscious on the part of the creator, that arise from culturally established connections. For instance, pasta with tomato sauce evokes "Italianness" (Polidoro 2008: Chap. 2). These associations are reinforced through the use of rhetorical figures such as metonymy, where different objects placed in the same scene symbolically acquire each other’s properties (e.g., tomato sauce is perceived as "natural" because it is photographed near fresh tomatoes), or metaphor, where one figure becomes so closely associated with another that it can effectively replace it (as when Peroni beer is referred to as "the blonde").

A visual text features a figurative plane, composed of actors and objects, which represents a moment within the broader narrative. This plane involves actantial roles and underlying values. The semiotician's task is to reconstruct these values, following the narrative flow. This is easier to trace in texts or videos that unfold through multiple events but can also be discerned in seemingly static advertisements or paintings. To aid in this reconstruction, the semiotician can turn to the other component of the visual regime: the plastic, which pertains to the plane of expression and, as Polidoro (2008: 98) explains, refers to "how visual configurations (lines, colors, spatial arrangements) generate effects of meaning independently of the figurative content, that is, the objects they represent." Key plastic categories include forms (e.g., long/short, continuous/discontinuous, straight/curved, open/closed), colors (including brightness), and topological elements (spatial relationships between components).

In semiotic analysis, plastic values must be connected to specific content to access their meaning. Initially, we can identify symbolisms, stable associations between an expressive element and a content element within a particular socio-cultural system. For instance, as Polidoro (2008: 107) observes, the color green is consistently associated with meanings such as "natural" and "sustainable." However, this does not imply that every instance of the color green evokes "natural/sustainable" meanings. Such interpretations are valid when an isotopy is detected—that is, when multiple indications of symbolic connection are found within the same text and culture. In contrast, green might signify "pharmaceutical" or "chemical/artificial" in an advertisement for the medical sector.

Similarly, the color and texture of wood, with its porous and irregular form, conveys symbolic meanings of warmth, home, and life in both domestic and specialized architectural contexts. In these cases, the inclusion of wood and its texture imparts a visual connotation that transcends mere representation, contributing to the overall meaning of a design or image.

We refer to semi-symbolism (Greimas - Courtés 1979) as a phenomenon where a pair of expressive elements (e.g., high/low, right/left) is consistently associated with a pair of content elements (e.g., good/evil, normality/abnormality, health/sickness). For example, lines moving from right to left evoke positivity and euphoria, whereas lines moving in the opposite direction create feelings of unease and anxiety (dysphoria). Images directed upward suggest lightness and idealism, while those oriented downward convey heaviness and realism.

2.6 Poetic function

The poetic function concerns the way the message is structured, its expressiveness, and its poetic power. Jakobson emphasizes that the poetic dimension is a crucial component of language and communicative exchange, stating that it "is not a supplementation of discourse with rhetorical adornment but a total revaluation of the discourse and of all its components whatsoever" (Jakobson 1987: 93).

There are no messages that merely describe reality (impressive force) without simultaneously incorporating an additional layer (expressive force). The manner in which content is expressed inevitably alters the content itself, rendering it more or less impactful to the recipient’s mind. This principle underlies great literature or works of art: the content of a profound narrative may be the same as that of its summarized form, but no one would ever compare the two.

The poetic function underpins narrativity itself, the structuring of a plot—first in verse, later in prose—that ultimately becomes a text. The poetic function rewrites, modifies, and transforms the other functions, asserting a certain dominance in relation to them.

In the constitution of a text, the poetic function is not confined solely to poetry: "Any attempt to restrict the sphere of the poetic function to poetry or to confine poetry to the poetic function would be a delusive oversimplification. This poetic function is not the sole function of verbal art but only its dominant, determining function, whereas in all other verbal activities it acts as a subsidiary, accessory constituent. This function, by promoting the palpability of signs, deepens the fundamental dichotomy between signs and objects. Hence, when dealing with the poetic function, linguistics cannot limit itself to the field of poetry" (Jakobson 1987: 69-70).

Semiotic communication theory cannot be confined solely to poetry, literature, or the history of art because the scope of the poetic function is essential even beyond these classical, "Aristotelian" domains. What, then, exists "outside poetry, when some other function overlaps with the poetic function" (Jakobson 1987: 193).

Outside the realm of poetry, Jakobson immediately directs us to the 1952 presidential campaign slogan of Dwight (Ike) Eisenhower, "I Like Ike." The slogan, conceived by Peter George Peterson (who would go on to become the director of the renowned advertising agency McCann Erickson in 1953), applies the poetic function through the use of alliteration and internal rhymes, rendering it particularly fluid and memorable. This, in turn, enhances its capacity to be retained and reused.

Alliteration, rhyme, synecdoche, hyperbole, metonymy, and metaphor (to name a few) are the tools of the poetic function—tropes that extend beyond poetry, playing a significant role in contexts such as political campaigns, which strategically leverage advertising tactics. This justifies the assertion that today, the "field outside poetry" is primarily occupied by advertising and branding, where, despite the apparent primacy of other functions such as the vocative, the poetic dynamic generates decisive effects.

Jakobson’s invitation to study the poetic function beyond the poetic realm remains undoubtedly tied to the context of verbal language. Building on subsequent semiotic analyses of other linguistic forms, we can consider a further extension of this category. If brand discourse relies heavily, at the verbal level, on the poetic function present in copywriting, it is equally true that this component also emerges in visual elements. These, too, are crafted through the above rhetorical mechanisms.

Moreover, rhetorical figures and tropes can be constructed not only through verbal language but also through visual and non-verbal language. Metaphors can be created through graphic signs, visual metonymies, and other forms of visual expression.

Functions do not operate in isolation within a communicative form, such as an advertisement, but always interact in a web of reciprocal references. Each function is interconnected, almost fused, with the others. The task of the communication expert is to identify these functions (when interpreting a text) or to harness their potential (when creating a text). In principle, all functions are present, and it is not always the case that each function can be pinpointed in a single element of the text. Multiple functions may coexist within a single textual component, while some may appear to be absent but still exert an implicit influence.

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, Jakobson’s model, with its functions, offers a framework capable of generating and governing the significations of a brand, particularly emphasizing its relational nature. The model presents a brand as a cluster of linguistic and communicative components that merit detailed analysis. The interdisciplinary nature of the model, which integrates semiotics with cognitive psychology and sociology with rhetoric, provides a rich set of tools for communicators and marketers who seek to apply it effectively.

Undoubtedly, this model has its limitations and requires further refinement: the notion of the sender remains overly univocal and individualistic (Eco will later replace it with the concept of "author"), while the idea of the receiver seems to assign too passive a role to the recipient. To develop a semiotic model of communication that is truly suited to contemporary contexts, it will be necessary to engage in a dialogue between Jakobson's approach and the perspectives of scholars such as Eco, Latour, and Floch.

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